

Introduction

SOME DEFINITION is required of the field covered by this study. The 'novel' is a notoriously difficult genre to define, but by common agreement it is written in continuous narrative prose and has a plot and characters who interact with each other. In the Civil War novel, some of these characters may be historical. In addition, there may be large amounts of barely disguised autobiographical information, so that it is often not easy to draw a line between fact and fiction. Memoirs and autobiographies (which exist in profusion) have been excluded.¹ Also excluded are short stories. (F. Ayala's *La cabeza del cordero* has the sustained thematic unity and development that is characteristic of the novel; it is therefore considered here as such.) Occasionally, passing reference may be made to forms other than the novel where these cast light on the particular work being discussed, but they will not in themselves be the object of study. Novels have been chosen which are written in Spanish, by Spaniards.² Works in Catalan, Basque or Galician are not included. The 'novel of the Spanish Civil War' is taken to mean novels in which the war itself, or the issues it represents for those taking part in it, whether as combatants or non-combatants, are a major theme. Novels which deal primarily with the pre-war, exile or post-war era are not included unless (like those of Gironella's trilogy) they form part of a series which embraces the war itself. Novels set *in* the war are not included, unless the war is their major theme. Having fixed these parameters, a considerable degree of subjective judgement has to be exercised in deciding what is, and what is not, a Civil War novel.³ I have often found other critics' choices idiosyncratic, and have attempted to be rigorous in my own choice of titles, but it will be no surprise to find that opinions differ in this respect.

In the course of his illuminating study, *Literature and Propaganda*

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(London, 1983), A.P. Foulkes discusses the ideas expressed by J. Ellul in an earlier work, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York, 1973). What Foulkes has to say about categorising works of literature as 'good' and 'bad' has a direct bearing on the present study, and is worth quoting in full:

Traditionally, it has been customary to divide literature into 'good' works and 'bad' works. The aesthetic criteria on which such judgements are based are not clearly established, and indeed the history of literature is littered with arguments concerning the relative 'greatness' or otherwise of individual authors or texts. Within Ellul's distinctions, one could differentiate works which question and subvert value systems from works which assimilate and reinforce such systems and one could then proceed into an enquiry into the values which inform the reading and critical reception of the works. Extreme instances of such processes can be observed in the literature surrounding revolution and radical social change.⁴

This study will depart from the convention followed by the large majority of critics who have chosen to treat only novelists of recognised literary merit. While passing reference may be made to the aesthetic quality of the work under discussion, that is not the criterion which will have justified the work's inclusion here. In one way, this has made my task an easier one, since, unlike I. Soldevila, I have not had to identify in advance who are 'les pamphlétaire et les écrivains médiocres', so that these can then be excluded.⁵ Nor have I had to decide, as J.I. Ferreras did, which writers are 'ante todo, sinceros',⁶ so that they, on the other hand, can be included. By treating here some writers of undoubted mediocrity and even, perhaps occasionally, questionable sincerity, I have greatly extended the range of novelists considered by literary critics such as E. de Nora, who, though he mentions some thirty-five novelists in all, limits himself to detailed consideration of less than a dozen authors in his chapter, 'El impacto de la guerra española en la novela'.⁷ Such selectivity has led some to believe, mistakenly, that few novels have been written on the Civil War.⁸ In examining in detail a much larger cross-section of novels than has normally been the case, and in focussing more sharply than most previous critics on the novels of the first wave, I hope to be able to elucidate the value systems of these writers and, to some degree, of their envisaged readership, at a time of social and political crisis, when the novel was often used as a weapon of propaganda, recrimination or self-justification.

The year 1966 has been chosen as a threshold in the central sections of the study for a number of reasons. The period 1936–66 comprises two literary generations, both of which were profoundly affected by the trauma of the

Civil War. Most of these writers had lived through the events described; even the youngest of them had experienced their immediate aftermath. By the late 1960s, a generation had emerged which no longer regarded the Civil War as *vivencia*. A major development in 1966 was the removal of prior censorship, in accordance with the new Press Law. Although this by no means implied freedom of expression, it may be regarded as an important step in the right direction. 'Desde 1966 puede observarse una cierta tolerancia respecto a las fuerzas más moderadas de la oposición.'⁹ There is no Republican novel published in Spain up to 1966. In 1967, the publication of Angel María de Lera's *Las últimas banderas* ushers in a new era. As P. Iolie observes, in the mid-1960s the attitude of Spaniards living in Spain to the Republican exiles undergoes a marked change.¹⁰ M. Bertrand de Muñoz confirms that the novels of the Republican exiles 'began to be known and to circulate after 1966'.¹¹ This critic goes further and identifies innovations in form and technique, too, in the later period: 'Following 1966 . . . works clearly different from earlier novels begin to appear. They were books in which the reader senses and observes a profound change in the very first pages, a new technical and formal orientation.'¹² I have used the terms 'Republican novelist', and 'Nationalist novelist' and arranged the bibliography accordingly, because up to the mid-1960s such a division still seems rational. Writers after this date, however, cannot so easily be classified: Benet, for example, defies such categorisation.

Notes

- 1 R. Sender's *Contraataque*, had it been the author's only contribution to the war literature, would probably not have found a place here. It is a useful counterpoint, however, to his other works.
- 2 I have been unable to trace the original Spanish version of A. Martínez Pagán's *Génaro*, which has been translated into French by B. Fléxas. The French version has been quoted, therefore, in this case.
D. Aguilera Malta does not strictly speaking justify a place here as he was born in Guayaquil, Ecuador. His work is occasionally quoted, however; he was studying in Spain when the war broke out and experienced life on the Republican side.
- 3 Novels such as R. Sender's *El rey y la reina* present an interesting dilemma. The symbolism implied, however, in Rómulo's pursuit of the unattainable, and his ultimate failure, surely allow us to consider this a novel of the Spanish Civil War.
- 4 *Literature and Propaganda*, pp. 12–13.
- 5 'Les romanciers devant la Guerre Civile espagnole', *La Revue de l'Université de Laval*, 14, no. 5 (1960), 428–442 (p. 436).
- 6 *Tendencias de la novela española, 1931–1969* (Paris, 1970), p. 90. Ferreras takes a deliberate decision to leave out 'escritores de circunstancias'.
- 7 *La novela española contemporánea*, 3 (Madrid, 1962), pp. 54–105.
- 8 D. Pérez Minik, for example, in *Novelistas españoles de los siglos XIX y XX* (Madrid, 1957) says of the Civil War as a theme: 'Nuestros novelistas la han eludido siempre. Sus razones tendrán' (p.

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- 336). The reality was that over 100 Civil War novels had been published in Spain and abroad by that time, by Spanish writers. P. Werrie appears to perpetuate the myth when he writes, concerning the publication of Gironella's *Los cipreses crecen en Dios* in 1953, that 'tous les récits qui s'étaient jusqu'alors inspirés de cette guerre n'étaient pas des romans' ('Le Roman espagnol d'aujourd'hui', *La Table Ronde*, 193 (1964), 91–101 (p. 94)). Again, the reality was that over 90 Civil War novels had been written in Spanish in this period.
- 9 S. Vilar, quoted in M.A. Compitello, 'Ordering the Evidence: The Vision of the Spanish Civil War in Post-War Spanish Fiction' (PhD thesis, University of Indiana, 1979), p. 33. This work was published in Barcelona in 1983 with the more accurate sub-title: '*Volverás a Región and Civil War Fiction*'. See also P. Ilie, *Literature and Inner Exile: Authoritarian Spain 1939–1975* (Baltimore, 1980), who confirms that 1966 marks a change of climate: 'Internal unrest and concern with co-existence (*convivencia*) grew stronger after 1966' (p. 16).
 - 10 'What circumstances in the mid-60s permitted the word "exile" first to gain tolerance or sympathy and then respectability?' (*Literature and Inner Exile*), p. 9.
 - 11 In J.B. Romeiser (ed.), *Red Flags, Black Flags: Critical Essays on the Literature of the Spanish Civil War* (Madrid, 1982), p. 212. M. Bertrand de Muñoz's contribution to this collection ('The Civil War in the Recent Spanish Novel, 1966–1976') is a valuable bibliographical reference.
 - 12 *Ibid.*, p. 209. The same writer underlines this point later: 'All Spanish Civil War novels written before 1966 were different from those under consideration here' (p. 223).

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Literature,
history and war

THE NOVELS of the Spanish Civil War are far from being 'historical novels' in the normal sense of the term. Their authors are, in the majority of cases, protagonists or eye witnesses of the war. This is not to say, however, that they do not have a sense of recording momentous historical events. Nor could they have been ignorant of the literary antecedents such as Galdós and his *episodio nacional*. Indeed G. Gómez de la Serna, in his study of the *episodio*, directly relates the more ambitious Civil War novels to this literary tradition (while excluding those works which remain at the anecdotal level).¹

It has been noted that the Spanish Romantic novelists often used distant historical events as the substance of fiction; this may well have been because two of their principal foreign models, Victor Hugo and Walter Scott, were proponents of this type of historical novel and play. The pattern of novel which emerged is described by F. Buendía: 'Desarrolla una acción novelesca en el pasado; sus personajes principales son imaginarios, en tanto que los personajes históricos y los hechos reales constituyen el elemento secundario del relato',² and could apply to a number of the novels being studied here; but the time span between the novels' publication and the events they describe is quite different. López Soler's *Los bandos de Castilla* (1830), Cosca Bayo's *La conquista de Valencia por el Cid* (1831), Larra's *El doncel de don Enrique el Doliente* (1834), Espronceda's *Sancho Saldaña* (1834), and others too numerous to mention, are set in the Middle Ages rather than in the recent past, due to the exotic attraction of the period for this particular generation.

The development of the historical novel has been towards a reduction in the space of time between the action described and the date of publication. Baroja's *Memorias de un hombre de acción*, Galdós's *Episodios nacionales* or Valle-Inclán's *La guerra carlista*, *Tirano Banderas*, or *La corte de los milagros*

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will serve to demonstrate this. Stephen Crane in *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) is describing a war which took place only 30 years before; Zola in *La Débâcle* (1892) recounts military events which are only 22 years old.³ In the process, the role allotted to history has increased in importance: 'Ya se acerca tanto la novela a la historia que ésta toma casi más importancia dentro del relato.'⁴ Increasing political emancipation and democratic discussion of issues led to more involvement, initially by the middle classes but later by the working classes also, in the intellectual debates of the day, and it is not surprising to see this reflected in literature. In addition, the memoir and the biography have acquired great popularity in a century in which psychoanalysis and interest in people's private lives and thoughts have reached unprecedented levels: the public interest is therefore served by the revelation of an individual conscience. Not surprisingly, 'recent national history exerts a stronger emotional pull on the author than remoter history does, and makes the author reveal his political beliefs and his expectations for the future of his country'.⁵ The crisis of conscience occasioned by the 1898 disaster is an illustration of how political events could arouse a Baroja, for example, to fury, and a whole generation to critical self-analysis. The *episodio nacional* seems a convenient means to achieve this, concentrating the mind on specific issues. While in his novels Galdós may broach philosophical and religious themes, in the *episodio*, 'it is the concrete, practical aspect of the national problem which comes to the fore'.⁶ Writers following on in this tradition display a 'strong politico-didactic element and a tendency to focus on historically significant public events occurring in the recent past or even in the author's own lifetime'.⁷

Even the greatest novelists, however, have experienced difficulties in wedding the two separate elements: the fictional life of a character (or group) and the social context in which they move. At its most ambitious, it may be compared to fusing the *Iliad*, the story of a group of individuals, and the *Aeneid*, the story of a nation. Writing of Tolstoy's achievement in *War and Peace*, P. Lubbock writes: 'It is a mighty antinomy indeed, on a scale adapted to Tolstoy's giant imagination. With one hand he takes up the largest subject in the world, the story to which all other human stories are subordinate, and not content with this, in the other hand he produces the drama of a great historic collision, for which a scene is set with no less prodigious a gesture.'⁸ But even Tolstoy struggles to control his subject matter, picking up his story and dropping it by turns. Nicholas and Natasha often recede into the background while Napoleon or Murat become the chief actors, and 'interminable chapters of comment and

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explanation, chapters in the manner of a controversial pamphlet', are inserted to make his message clear.⁹

To Ortega y Gasset this would have come as no surprise, sceptical as he was about the capacity of any writer to merge the real and the imagined in this way:

Esta es la razón por la cual nace muerta toda novela lastrada con intenciones trascendentales, sean éstas políticas, ideológicas, simbólicas o satíricas. Porque estas actividades son de naturaleza tal, que no pueden ejercitarse ficticiamente, sino que sólo funcionan referidas al horizonte efectivo de cada individuo. Al excitarlas es como si se nos empujase fuera del intramundo virtual de la novela y se nos obligase a mantener vivaz y alerta nuestra comunicación con el orbe absoluto de que nuestra existencia real depende. ¿Cómo voy a interesarme por los destinos imaginarios de los personajes si el autor me obliga a enfrentarme con el crudo problema de mi propio destino político o metafísico? El novelista ha de intentar, por el contrario, anestesiarnos para la realidad, dejando al lector recluso en la hipnosis de una existencia virtual.

Yo encuentro aquí la causa, nunca bien declarada, de la enorme dificultad – tal vez imposibilidad – aneja a la llamada 'novela histórica.' La pretensión de que el cosmos imaginado posea a la vez autenticidad histórica, mantiene en aquélla una permanente colisión entre dos horizontes. Y como cada horizonte exige una acomodación distinta de nuestro aparato visual, tenemos que cambiar constantemente de actitud: no se deja al lector soñar tranquilo la novela, ni pensar rigurosamente la historia.¹⁰

The problem may be perceived as twofold. The writer may well have a sense of awe in portraying a Napoleon or a Franco he is very unlikely to know intimately. (It is not surprising, therefore, that Franco is rarely portrayed in the Civil War novel. His portrayal in *Los cinco libros de Ariadna* demonstrates that it is easier to caricature such a character than it is to draw him true to life.) Secondly, the perception of the character on the part of the reader is bound to change with time and with personal circumstances. While this may be true to some degree of imagined characters, it is much more marked in the case of real political figures. This must have been acutely felt by the exiled Republican reader in whom the appearance of a Queipo de Llano or Millán Astray would have provoked quite a different emotional response from that provoked in the reader of today. (Indeed, many readers today would have difficulty in establishing, for example, in Aub's labyrinth of characters, which are historical and which imagined. And of those we consider imagined, how many are historical characters, with different names, recognisable to Aub's intimate circle?)

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Having decided to incorporate historical material the novelist is expected by his public to do so truthfully. As H. Klein has indicated, this has made war literature different from most other fiction (at least in the short term):

Fiction has had an immediate factual correlative of which millions were intensely aware. And the overriding criterion applied to war fiction was truth. The tradition of Realism had created the expectation that fiction would be a convincing mirror, would be true to life. With regard to war novels, however, quite a different demand was made which exacted not *verisimilitude*, but *truth to facts* . . . These are proceedings normally used in assessing history, and possibly apposite for the numerous (often apologetic) mémoires and biographies of the great leaders, but they are hardly adequate as the primary considerations for works of fiction.¹¹

A concern for truth to facts, even in history itself, is a relatively modern concept. Nineteenth-century positivists attempted to make history a scientific discipline, by analogy with natural science, by accumulating copious data from which general laws could be drawn. More recently, relativist theories of history have emerged which reject the existence of facts, claiming that these do not exist until the historian creates them. Baroja was well aware of this, as C. Longhurst demonstrates in his study of this writer's historical novels.

Al conocimiento completo de un personaje por documentación no se puede llegar más que rara vez. Únicamente en el caso poco frecuente de que haya relaciones de testigos presenciales y se sepa que estos testigos presenciales no tenían ni simpatía ni odio por la figura histórica analizada y estudiada, se podría llegar a este resultado. Pero ¿cuándo pasa esto? Casi nunca. Todas las grandes figuras de la historia, buenas o malas, que se tomen por auténticas están construidas, en parte inventadas, por autores que no las han conocido.¹²

There is no such thing in history as a standard method, as there might be in an exact science. Nor is there an objective basis of fact, such as atomic weight in physics or molecular structure in chemistry. Roquentin, the protagonist of Sartre's *La Nausée*, sets out to write a biography of M. de Rollebon, but despairs of making sense of the multiple sources of information, often conflicting, on which he is basing his work. He comes to believe that the facts arrange themselves according to the order that the historian gives them and not according to any inviolable structure of truth. Roquentin concludes, 'Le passé n'existe pas', and that he would do better to write a work of fiction about his subject.¹³ The problem is not new. The bibliographer of the Civil War will appreciate the problems described by R.C. Williams, who in his preface to the bibliography of the seventeenth-

century French novel reported difficulties in excluding works of history from the listing because of their ‘imaginative quality’.¹⁴ A concern for accuracy in French bibliography dates only from the latter part of the seventeenth century, when a preoccupation with the *vrai* in history was matched by a concern for the *vraisemblable* in narrative fiction, leading to the incorporation of a great deal of historical material.

Prose narrative, taking over as it does the tradition of the epic poem, is ‘especially suited to the full re-creation of historical events and state of society’.¹⁵ While the poet can perhaps better capture the immediacy of the event, the novelist often has time to formulate a more comprehensive view. However, such hindsight may not always be beneficial. Human history is inevitably more complex in the realisation than in the recollection. Firstly, political decisions that appear rational at the time may appear less so when weighted with other evidence which is made available to the historian later: the role of the Spanish Communist Party in the events of Barcelona in May 1937 is better understood in the context of Stalin’s purge of dissidents within Russia itself, which was not given prominence by the West at the time, as she needed Russia as an ally in the fight against Hitler’s Germany. Secondly, the novelist of the Civil War (with few exceptions) knows the outcome of the struggle he is describing, a factor which is bound to influence his entire presentation.¹⁶ In this sense, at least, the narrator is omniscient whether he likes it or not. Fernández-Cañedo points to a conjunction of personal experience and private study in the Civil War novelist, which he considers fruitful:

La existencia de una erudición respecto al tema a tratar facilitará el crecimiento de la obra. Simultáneamente, el preconocimiento de un tema permite al artista aumentar el valor documental de la novela, revelándole qué ángulos exigen mayor detención, qué puntos muertos de las obras anteriores a la suya debe, en su creación, iluminar . . . En la novela de guerra, la experiencia directa del autor es de todo punto necesaria; sin ella, no se logra el matiz de realidad vivida, la emoción, la geografía exacta percibida en el peligro. Me atrevo a afirmar que la conjunción de ambas circunstancias en los escritores de la guerra civil española ha sido beneficiosa para sus obras.¹⁷

As we shall see later, the sense of ‘immediacy’ conveyed by many of these novels is achieved at the cost of balance. The tension between the affective world of the protagonist and his historical circumstance is rarely resolved to the reader’s satisfaction. Ortega’s ‘horizons’ refused stubbornly to merge. The concept of social realism embodied by Zola, which was to influence European literature so profoundly, seemed incapable of resolving this

conflict. It has been expressed by one critic as the attempt to combine the documentary and the visionary:

The novelist, like the scientist, had to be at the same time objective and prophetic, had to do justice to the foreground and background of human existence, the action on the stage and the back projection of social and biological evolution. Transferred to the realm of literature, the achievement of such aims involves the combination of two literary modes – the documentary and the visionary, a combination which involves a potentially awkward mixing of styles.¹⁸

The events being described sometimes seem so transcendental to the author that he is reluctant to alter them in any way. A remarkable example of this occurs in José Andrés Vázquez's *Armas de Caín y Abel*, in which he suspends the narrative at one point to introduce the factual report of the capture of Seville by General Queipo de Llano. He explains this unusual technique in a footnote:

Para descubrir estos transcendentales episodios históricos, cuyo interés real y verdadero jamás podría ser superado por la ficción novelesca, el Autor ha prescindido en absoluto de su condición de novelista y se ha ajustado rigurosamente al relato hecho por el propio general D. Gonzalo Queipo de Llano.¹⁹

But he is not alone in this view. Hemingway has written that some events are of such a magnitude that 'if a writer has participated in them his obligation is to write them truly rather than assume the presumption of altering them with invention'.²⁰ This may well explain the existence in such literature of unlikely situations: fact is often stranger than fiction; the *vrai* may not in fact be *vraisemblable*, as Sender points out in the prologue to *Los cinco libros de Ariadna*: 'Hay muchas cosas autobiográficas (justamente las que parecerán más inverosímiles) y algunas inventadas (las que el lector creará tal vez auténticas).'²¹

The Civil War novelist, therefore, finds the materials for his construction close to hand, in lived experience. Despite the references critics may make to literary antecedents, we should be aware that in the case of the majority of novelist-protagonists the inspiration springs from the conflict itself. And whilst intellectuals like Aub, Ayala, Sender, Foxá or Gironella were well-read, a host of novelist-protagonists were not. A similar pattern is clearly discernible in the French literature of the First World War:

La guerre . . . est fertile en thèmes littéraires, en ce qu'elle confronte l'homme avec la mort, le risque, le situe par rapport aux deux pôles contraires du courage et la peur,